

SPECIES FACT SHEET

Asteraceae (Aster family)

Russian Knapweed

Acroptilon repens

At a Glance

- Perennial
- Creeping herbaceous plant with erect, branched stems, up to 3 feet (90 cm) tall
- Flowers through summer into fall depending on location
- Reproduction primarily from vegetative root buds
- Leaves vary from bottom to top of plant, and stems and leaves are covered with dense gray hairs
- Exotic

Habitat and Ecology

Russian knapweed is found in most western states (Figure 1). It is a native plant of southern Ukraine, southeast Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia, where it grows on various soils (e.g., clay, sandy, or rocky soils in prairies and meadows, shores of lakes and rivers, slopes, and bottomlands, as well as saline soils) (Beck 2008). It also occurs on cultivated land, dry pastures, and degraded non-cropland. In the United States Russian knapweed grows in similar places and usually invades disturbed areas. Once established, it spreads outward into undisturbed areas (Carpenter and Murray no date), and eventually may form

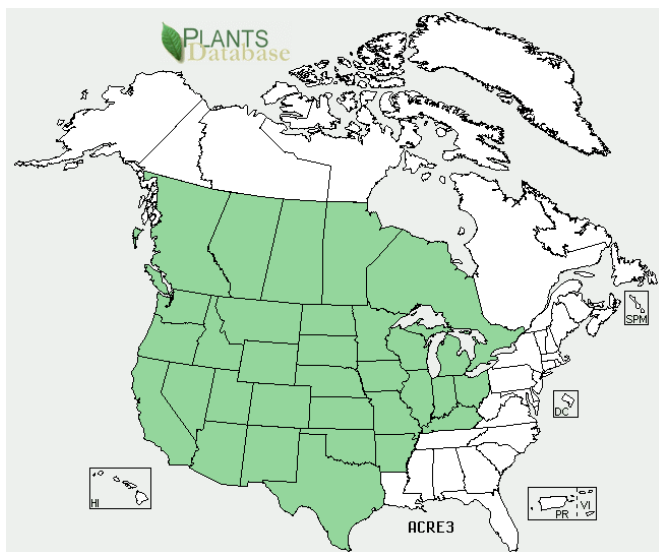


Figure 1. Distribution map courtesy of USDA Plants Database <http://plants.usda.gov/index.html>.

EXOTIC



Russian knapweed

dense, single species stands through competition and allelopathy.

Description

This creeping, herbaceous perennial plant has erect, branched stems that may grow 18-36 inches (45-90 cm) tall (Beck 2008). It reproduces primarily from vegetative propagation, and secondarily from seed. It is persistent and has an extensive root system. Its roots are dark brown to black, have a scaly appearance, and may grow to a depth of 23 feet (7 m) (Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts 2008). Russian knapweed can produce as many as 27 root shoots per square foot. The plant is toxic to horses.

Leaves

Lower and upper leaves on this plant are different. Lower leaves are deeply lobed and 2-4 inches (5-10 cm) in length; upper leaves can be slightly lobed and are smaller (Beck 2008). Dense gray hairs cover both leaves and shoots.

Flowers and Seeds

Russian knapweed flowers through the summer and into fall. The pink, lavender, or white flowers are solitary and urn-shaped. Occurring on the shoot tips, they are about 0.25 to 0.50 inches (6.3-12.7 mm) in diameter (Beck 2008) and have smooth papery bracts.

The seeds of Russian knapweed are grayish or ivory and have long white bristles, which fall from the seed as it ages (Carpenter and Murray no date). Oval in shape and

penter and Murray no date). The name “repens” refers to the creeping growth of the rootstocks.



Russian knapweed seeds

compressed, the seeds are 0.08-0.12 inches (2-3 mm) long, 0.08 inches (2 mm) across, and 0.04 inches (1 mm) thick. They are somewhat ridged longitudinally. Seeds are not the primary means of reproduction, but about 50-500 are produced per shoot (Beck 2008). Seeds are viable for 2-3 years in soil.

Introduction in the U.S.

Russian knapweed is thought to have been introduced in the U.S. as a contaminant of Turkestan alfalfa seed and, possibly, sugarbeet seed (Carpenter and Murray no date). It first appeared in California, between 1910 and 1914, and has since become widespread in the U.S.



Russian knapweed flowers

Etymology

The name “acroptilon” means feathery tip and refers to the plume-like bristle at the tip of the flower head bracts (Car-